

Occidental Chemical Corp

EPA Region 3

Pennsylvania

Montgomery County

Lower Pottsgrove

Township

EPA ID# PAD980229298

15th Congressional District

Last Update:

August 2002

Other Names:

None

Current Site Status

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is overseeing the cleanup of the Occidental Chemical site. Occidental is paying for the work and carrying out the cleanup under EPA's oversight. Occidental finished construction needed for groundwater cleanup in January 1999. Two pilot tests for the cleanup of the lagoon material were tried, but both failed. The last field work involved sampling the lagoons and some on-site wells. One new off-site well was installed for this sampling work to obtain comparison data. Occidental recently submitted the results of the sampling and EPA is currently evaluating it. The data collected will be used to gauge the current conditions of the lagoons and if needed, re-evaluate the cleanup approach.

Site Description

Four consecutive owners disposed industrial wastes at the 250-acre Occidental Chemical Corporation. Prior to the second World War, this

site was owned by Jacobs Aircraft Engine Company, which built engines here. The Defense Plant Corporation (DPC) bought the site from Jacobs in 1942, however Jacobs continued to operate and manufacture aircraft engines for DPC until late 1944. In 1945, DPC leased the site to Firestone Tire and Rubber (FTR), which later purchased the site in 1950. FTR made tires and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) resins at the site. In 1980, FTR sold the property to Occidental Chemical Corporation. Occidental continues to manufacture PVC resins at the site today.

From 1942 to 1985, operators dumped wastes, including cutting oils, metal filings, tires, and PVC sludge resins, into a 17-acre solid waste landfill. In 1977, FTR requested permission from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP) to expand this landfill. PADEP granted the expansion and required continuous pumping of groundwater beneath the site to prevent contaminants from moving offsite. In 1985, with state approval, the owner closed this landfill, capping it with a rubber cover and two feet of soil. During the EPA's investigation, the nature and extent of groundwater contamination was further defined. The groundwater pumping continues today.

Another landfill operated onsite; its seven acres were used for disposing residual wastes. In July 1997, PADEP approved a Closure Plan for this landfill, which was then capped in 1998.

Two other waste disposal areas – a pair of lined lagoons built in 1974 – were closed in 1995. When they were open, these lined lagoons received the PVC sludge overflow from the plant wastewater treatment system. The site also encompasses four inactive, un-lined lagoons. These un-lined lagoons are being addressed under the Superfund program.

The site surroundings are both agricultural and urban. Pottstown, with an approximate population of 22,000, is the closest major town. Approximately 31,000 people live within a two-mile radius of the site. The site is in the flood plain of the Schuylkill River, which is used both for water supply and for recreational activities. The Superfund actions will address the groundwater contamination and the un-lined earthen lagoons.

Site Responsibility


Cleanup of this site is the responsibility of the federal government and parties potentially responsible for site contamination.

NPL Listing History

Our country's most serious uncontrolled or abandoned hazardous waste sites can be cleaned using federal money. To be eligible for federal cleanup money, a site must be put on the National Priorities List . This site was proposed to the National Priorities List on June 24, 1988 and formally added to the list on October 4, 1989.

Threats and Contaminants

The groundwater is contaminated with volatile organic compounds (VOCs), including trichloroethylene (TCE) and vinyl chloride from former manufacturing activities. The groundwater it is pumped continuously toward the center of the site. Because of this, there is no movement of the contaminated groundwater from the site. All of the treated water gets used by the facility in its manufacturing. The local drinking water supply is provided by a Pottstown municipal facility, which depends on water from the Schuylkill River. The earthen lagoons contained PVC sludge, and are primarily contaminated with TCE and vinyl chloride monomer.

Contaminant descriptions and associated risk factors are available on the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry, an arm of the CDC, web site at <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/hazdat.html> 

Cleanup Progress

Occidental Chemical finished a study of the sites' contamination in the spring of 1993. In the summer of 1993, the EPA selected the approaches for site cleanup. The cleanup focuses on two areas: the groundwater and the un-lined earthen lagoons. The groundwater remedy involves extracting and treating groundwater using air stripping (air strips away the contaminants), paired with vapor-phase carbon absorption (the carbon removes the contaminants from the air), and long-term monitoring of the groundwater contamination. The earthen lagoon remedy involves the digging up and recycling the

residual PVC material, in addition to excavating and disposing of a layer of crushed coal and polluted soil near the earthen lagoons. When finished with digging, the area will be restored to original land contours using clean fill.

Additional sampling was done on a sediment pond, drainage swale, and other areas in the on-site flood plain. In June 1994, EPA ordered the PRPs to design and carry out the cleanup for this site. The design for the groundwater remedy was finished in August 1997. Construction for the groundwater remedy started in March 1998, and was completed in January 1999.

Recent work involved the removal of soil from a portion of a drainage swale located south of the site in the floodplain. A total of 200 tons of soil were excavated and sent offsite for disposal. After excavation, the drainage swale was backfilled with clean fill and the top foot was backfilled with rip-rap. Additional sampling was conducted in the lagoon material, off-site soils and some on-site wells. One new off-site well was also installed to obtain comparison data. Occidental has submitted the data and EPA is evaluating it. The data collected will be used to gauge the current conditions of the lagoons and re-evaluate the remedy, if needed.

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Detailed public files (Administrative Record) on EPA's actions and decisions for this site can be examined at the following locations:

Pottstown Public Library
500 High Street
Pottstown, PA 19464

U.S. EPA Region III
Administrative Record Room, 6th Floor
1650 Arch St.
Philadelphia, PA 19103-2029
215-814-3157

Please call for an appointment.